

An absolute, indefeasible, hereditary Right contrary to Reason and Scripture.

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# S E R M O N

Preached upon Occasion of the

## Present Rebellion,

At the Cathedral, and the Churches belonging to the Archdeaconry of *Armagh*, December 25, January 12, and 19, 1745.

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By the Reverend *Charles Walter Congreve*,  
Archdeacon of *Armagh*, and Chaplain to His  
Grace the Lord Primate of all *Ireland*.

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## I. Chron. Chap. v. Verse 1, 2.

Now the sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel, (for he was the first-born, but forasmuch as he defiled his fathers bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright.

For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler, but the birthright was Josephs )

**T**H E R E are two things remarkable in my Text. The first is, that *Reuben* the first born, and heir of the Patriarch, *Jacob*, lost his Birthright by Incest, from whence I shall make this Observation, that there may be a sufficient Reason for setting aside a Person's Birthright, according to the circumstances of the Person, and the Reason for setting it aside, or in other words, where the greater Good and the less Evil lies on the Side of taking the advantage of the Persons Forfeiture of his Right, either by his Crime, or by his Incapacity for answering the Ends, for the Sake of which he was invested with it.

The second Thing remarkable is, that tho' on the Failure of *Reuben* his Birthright was given to the Sons of *Joseph*, yet when it pleased God, on the Rejection of *Saul*, to transfer the Kingdom to another Tribe, he did not regard the Rule of the Birthright, which belonged to *Joseph*, as the Psalmist observes, *Psal. 78. 67, 68.* He refused the Tabernacle of *Joseph*, and chose not the Tribe of *Ephraim*, but chose the Tribe of *Judah*, and gave

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the Kingdom to *David*, who was of that tribe, according to the Prophecy of *Jacob*, Gen. 49. 8. And of this Tribe, of the House and Lineage of *David*, our Saviour Christ was born.

The Birth of our Blessed Saviour, which we commemorate at this Season, may be considered, either 1st. with respect to the Doctrine of the Incarnation itself, or the manner of his coming into the World, or 2dly, with respect to the End and Design of his coming, which was the Happiness and Salvation of Mankind: 1st. by making an Attainment for our Sins, and reconciling us to God, and 2dly, by instructing us in the true Knowledge and Practice of the Will of God, which ought to be drawn from the pure Fountain of his own Word, and not from the adulterated Streams of Opinions, or Parties, or of our own Prejudices, and biased Passions.

I shall at this time take Occasion from the Observation made on my Text, namely that there may be a sufficient Reason for setting aside a Person's Birthright, to consider the Knowledge and Practice of our Duty with respect to this one particular Point, yet so, as that I hope what will be said on this Occasion will be of the greatest Use to direct us in the Knowledge and Practice of the Will of God in every other particular.

I need not tell you what great Occasion there is for this at a Season, when Christianity, that is true Christianity itself is struck at, not by Reason and Argument, but by open Force and Violence from our Adversaries the Papists, who would obtrude a Prince upon us, on Pretence of an hereditary Right, that they may force us to submit to the Dictates and Traditions of Men, instead of the pure Word of God, as the Rule and Guide of our Faith and Practice, on Pretence of an Infallibility, which has no

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Warrant from Scripture, and confutes itself, since Popes deciding contrary to each other, can not be both infallible ; nor can it answer its End, as we cannot be infallibly assured of the thing to be decided, unless we are so, that the Person who decides, is infallible ; and unless we had an infallible Rule to judge by, such as the Seal of Miracles to the Apostles, or a plain Declaration of Scripture, we may as well mistake in determining, who this infallible Guide is, or whether there be any such Person, as in understanding the difficult parts of Scripture ; and as to such as are plain and necessary, we can not be more certain that we understand the Pope or the Council, than the Word of God, right. This high Presumption has led them to take away the second Commandment and divide the tenth into two, in order to screen the Idolatry of their Church, to corrupt the Word of God, and to forbid the People to read it, or to use their Reason in understanding the plainest things in it, as if a Person should desire us to let him put out our Eyes, that we may see the better, or that he may lead us right, least we should lose our Way. But as our Saviour observes of those other Pretenders to Infallibility, the Scribes and Pharisees, whom the Governors of the Church of *Rome* are the exact Copies of \*, except that they have added Idolatry to their other Abominations ; *If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.* It was, my Brethren, by this glorious Light of the Gospel, that our Ancestors discovered what a monstrous Structure they had erected on the Religion of Christ, how unlike the beauty and Proportion of the original Building. It is by it we hold this in-

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\* See Mat. 23. and Whitby's Notes upon it.

valuable Treasure, and whilst we do, it will guard us against Superstition and Idolatry, and direct us in the right Way to Everlasting Salvation, that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against us.* And may we never betray this sacred Trust, but continue it faithfully to ourselves, and to our Posterity.

But to return: A Prejudice in Favour of other Men's Rights, has the Appearance of Zeal for Truth, and Justice, but when carried beyond what the Reason of Things, and the Word of God allows of, it degenerates into superstition, and is productive of the worst of consequences. This has been our Case with respect to the Rights of our Princes, in Favour of whom, an unalterable, hereditary Right has been maintained, to the hazard of the Protestant Religion and the Liberties of Mankind, and to the encouraging of our Enemies to disturb our Peace. But if this Opinion were to take place on the Patriarchal Scheme, the House of *Steward* would have no more right, than the House of *Hanover*, but there must be one universal Monarch of the World, the immediate Descendant of *Adam*, to whom this Right belongs. But where is this Monarch? or who shall prove his Pedigree? The Absurdity is so glaring, that the Patrons of this Opinion are forced to change the Foundation of their Scheme and to declare that the present Possessor has the best Right, till another can shew a better, which is plainly to confess that it is impossible to know, who has this Right; and since Men must be governed, it is surely better that those should govern, who protect Religion and Liberty, than those who would destroy it.

If we consult Reason and Scripture in this Matter we shall find quite other Measures to govern ourselves by. There is no express Law of God binding to all Men in Favour of an hereditary Right, though

though the natural Superiority of an elder Brother over a younger, seems to be taken notice of in the case of *Cain* and *Abel*, and the Succession of the first-born was preserved in the *Jewish* and most other Nations, as a convenient, not an unalterable Rule, for the avoiding of contention, and the support of Kingdoms and Families. But God seldom interposed himself (and he interposes by his Providence, as well as by Appointment) but the Rule was altered, as in the Case of *Esau* and *Jacob*, where the Posterity of the *Elder*, was to *serve the Younger*, of *Saul* and *David*, where the Kingdom was transferred from one Family to another, of *Adonijah* and *Solomon*, where the youngest succeeded by Divine Appointment. And this to shew, that *God is the Judge, he putteth down one, and setteth up another.* *Psal. 75. 7.* and that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. *Dan. 4. 25.* Accordingly to remove all scruple, upon an alteration of Government, a Divine Command, delivered by the Prophets, and Apostles, enjoined the Obedience of the Subject to the *Chaldean* and the *Roman* Emperors, not on account of an hereditary Right, which neither *Nebuchadnezzar* nor *Augustus* had the least pretence to, but as *St. Paul* expressly says, for the Good of Mankind. *Rom. 13.*

It is objected that Governors are *ordained of God*, and therefore are not to be altered by Man; and so is every Law of God, but yet most of them admit of Exceptions, for the Good of Mankind, the only reason for making any Law, and therefore to be interpreted by it, as shall be shewn hereafter. But *St. Paul* does not say, that an hereditary Right, but the Powers, that be, the established Government, whatever it is, is *ordained of God*, is brought about by his overuling Providence, which directs the evil, as well as the good of others, to the general Good,

and the Exercise of their Power, in whatever hands it is, is *ordained* for the Good of Mankind, and therefore the Obedience of the Subject is commanded.

It is objected that the Primitive Christians submitted to Heathen, and therefore we ought, to Popish Governors, but we have now, God be thanked, a Protestant Prince upon the Throne, by the best of all Titles, the merciful Dispensations of the Providence of God to his Church, and the free Consent of his People, for the Preservation of their Religion and Liberties, which is surely a better Title, than that of *Nebuchadnezzar* or *Augustus*, and therefore we are bound to him, by all the Laws of God and Man, and many of us by the most solemn Oaths, and what Punishment Perjury may expect, we may see by the Example of Zedekiah. *Ezek. 17. 19.*

With respect to the Submission of Christians to Heathens, Christianity was not to be introduced into the World by the Violence of a few, contending against their Governors, which would have obstructed its Progress, and have raised the greatest Prejudice against it, but by a Divine Power, subjecting the Hearts of Men, by Reason and Conviction, to the King of Kings, and forming in them a divine Frame and Temper of Mind, in order to their Happiness in an immortal State: A Dispensation which did not disturb, but supported the temporal Government of the World, if Governors had kept within the Bounds of it. But the Heathens acted then, as the Papists do now, and put Men to Death for obeying God rather than Men. And God, who brings Good out of Evil, made use of the Persecution of the Heathens, to carry on his own Designs in separating the Gold from the Dross, the Good from the Bad, by the Fire of Persecution, in purifying and refining it in the

the Furnace of Adversity, and setting up an Example to all future Generations of the greatest Virtue, and the most inviolable Fidelity to his Worship and Service, and in giving the strongest Evidence to the Truth of those Miracles, which were wrought for the Proof of Christianity. For no Evidence can be stronger than that of a Number of Persons laying down their Lives to prove, not their Sincerity in believing Opinions, in which Men may be deceived, but the Truth of their Testimony, to Facts, which they had seen, felt and heard, in which Men cannot be deceived, and this, without any one of them having ever confessed the Imposture, to save his Life, if there had been any.

However our Saviour, who came not to destroy but to perfect the Law of Nature, did not take away the natural Rights of Mankind to self-defence, which he has wrought into the Frame of every Creature, but regulated them, and taught us the Wisdom of a patient Submission to evils, which cannot be avoided without a greater evil, and the Virtue of it for the Good of others, as a Christian Duty ; and assured us of a Reward hereafter to support us in the Practice of it. And as civil Wars and Disturbances of State are of such pernicious Consequence to the Publick, there are few things for the avoiding of which, we ought to bear more. St. Paul tells us, Christianity has made no Alteration, but left us as it found us, as to our civil Concerns, *1 Cor. 7. 17—24.* but with respect to private Christians, he advises, *if thou mayest be made free use it rather.* And when that time came that Christians in general might be made free, it pleased God to send them a Deliverer, Constantine the Great, and then they, who now made the Majority of the Empire, acted in a different Manner according to the different Circumstances they were under, when united to the State, which

which they were under a double Obligation to support, and might Claim the Protection of, as St. *Paul* did, not only for their own, but for the Relief of their persecuted Brethren: And when *Licinius* persecuted the Christians, insomuch that as *Eusebius* observes, the East and West were like Night and Day, the one being overspread with Darkness and Cruelty, whilst the other enjoyed the Sunshine of Peace and Prosperity, *Constantine* made no Scruple of marching against his Brother-in-law for their Relief, and when the Hand of Providence held forth the means of their Deliverance, we don't find, the Christians themselves had any Scruples about joining a Christian against a Heathen Emperor, as we did a Protestant against a Popish Prince at the Revolution, and the Providential Disposition of things at that Time, plainly shewed that we acted in it for the greater Good, which when all Things are duly considered, ought to determine us in all, and does in most Points, by a Force wrought into the very Frame and Constitution of our Natures, and distinguished by the Name of common Sense. I wish we had all acted since the Revolution, as the Primitive Christians did at that time, who never had a Thought of joining with his Pagan Subjects to restore *Licinius* or his Heirs, but were thankful for their Deliverance, and rejoiced in the Completion of that Prophecy, that *Kings* should be the *nursing Fathers*, and *Queens* the *nursing Mothers* of the Church. *Isa* 49. 23.

But there are still stronger Arguments than these, and such, as I think it impossible to resist the Force of, if they are clearly understood, and impartially considered. For God must have created us as first, either for his own, or for our Benefit, since a Being of infinite Wisdom and Goodness cannot act, but for some good End. For his own it could not be,

be, because being infinitely and independently happy in himself and from himself, in the Enjoyment of his own unspeakable Perfections, as well before, as since he created any thing, he has no occasion for us, or for our Services, *as though he needed any thing*, as St. Paul speaks. *Acts 17.25*. It must therefore be for ours, to communicate his Goodness and Happiness to his Creatures, according to their different Ranks and Capacities for receiving it; to the End there might be other Beings also happy, besides himself, and enjoy themselves. And for the same Reason he continues to preserve and govern us for no other End, but that he may continue to do us good. The Laws therefore, by which he governs us, can be only the true Methods of making us happy, and even his Punishments, and the Punishments inflicted on his own Son for our Sins, and to be inflicted on Angels and evil Men at the last Day, are only a necessary Guard to deter all his rational Creatures to Eternity, from running away from their Duty and from their Happiness, and to convince them by Experience, the most forcible, and effectual kind of Knowledge, that their Happiness consists only in obeying him and in being like him. And consequently all Laws Human or Divine, and particularly those, on which our Scruples are founded, can have no other End or Intention, but the Good of his Creatures, and must be governed by it and subservient to it. Accordingly our Saviour has taught us, that whenever any Law contradicts this End, it is a just Exception to the general Rule, - and that we are not to regard the Letter of the Law but the End and Intention of it. *Thou shalt not kill* was a general, moral Law, yet Magistrates and Soldiers may kill without transgressing this Law. No Words could be more general or express than those enjoining the Rest of the Sabbath, *thou shalt do no manner of work*, yet this Rest, and

and consequently this hereditary Right, must give way to a greater Good. And though our Saviour's own Divine Authority in this Case might have been sufficient, yet this is a Matter of such vast Importance to give light into the original Order and Foundation of all Things, and to direct us in the Practice of every Duty, and the understanding of every Law, that he has established it, by a greater Variety of Arguments, than any one Point of Duty in the whole Gospel. Thus he argues for Exceptions to all general Rules or Laws, when they contradict the Good of Mankind: 1st. from the Nature, Goodness and Example of God. *John 5. 17. My father worketh hitherto, continueth to do Good by Works of Creation and Providence at all Times and Seasons, and I work: Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,* and it would be well we would learn what this meaneth, as it would be a greater guard against Superstition, and a better Guide to us, applied to every Instance of our Duty, as it is by our Saviour to more than one. See *Mat. 9. 13. 12. 17.* than all the Casuistry in the World. 2dly, From the Necessity of observing superior Laws, which are more for the Good of Mankind, as that of Circumcision, and the Service of the Temple, and his own, and as has been shewn, and appears from our Saviour's arguments on this occasion, the Happiness of his Creatures is the supreme Law, that gives Law to all other Laws and Constitutions whatsoever. 3dly, From the Nature of Things, and the End and Intention of all Laws: *Mark 2. 27. The Sabbath, and consequently Government, was made for man not man for the Sabbath, or for Government.* And lastly from the common Sense and Reason of Mankind and the Practice of the best Men.

And let it not be objected that the Laws we are contending about are moral, or as I have heard it on this Occasion, that when an Authority, equal to

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our Saviour's, admits the like Exceptions for the Good of Mankind, to other Laws, we will admit them. For our Saviour's own Arguments appeal to the Reason of Mankind, and are drawn from Topsicks of Reason, equally affecting all Laws. He himself blames the Jews for not making these Exceptions from their own Reason and Experience, before they had his Authority for it, and condemns them on this and other Occasions for not making a right Use of their Reason: *Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment. And why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?* Luke 12.

57.

As to the other Objection. Marriage, the foundation of domestick Government, the only Government which is from Nature, and the Beginning of all Order in Society, is not to be dissolved for every Cause, but yet our Saviour allows Adultery to be a sufficient Cause. All Laws are in part moral, that is, tend to some good End independent of Institution, the ceremonial Part being only the means to the End. And as to such as are purely so, some of them admit of Exceptions, as has been shewn above, that is, where the greater good and the less evil lies on the Side of the Exceptions: Some of them do not, that is, such, as no Circumstances can alter or make the contrary good; for instance those on which the Authority of his Government over his Creatures, and consequently their Happiness depends, of which kind is that, *Matth. 4. 10. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve: And to obey God, rather than man, in which our whole Controversy with the Papists lies, and which obliged us to protest against the Decisions of the Church of Rome, which are directly contrary to the Word of God.* These Commands admit of no Exceptions: In them our Allegiance to our great Creator, his own peculiar honour,

honour, and Service is concerned, and we ought always to be ready and prepared, in the firm Purpose of our minds, to confess him before Men, and to lay down our Lives rather than fall down, and worship the Idols, which either Heathens or Papists have set up, or deny him, who will not endure a Rival in his Government, or in our Hearts, nor give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images, Isa. 42. 8. And if his Providence calls us to it, he bids us be faithful unto Death, and he will give us a crown of life, Rev. 2. 10. And it is profitable for us to enter into life, by a violent Death, rather than to be cast into hell. Matt. 5. 30.

I am perswaded there are a great many who have a sincere regard to the Protestant Religion, but as if they had forgot what they owe to it, have run away with a Notion, from an early Prejudice, in favour of an indefeasible hereditary Right, which it appears, owes its Birth to neither Reason, nor Scripture, but was bred by our unhappy Divisions, nursed by the same unnatural Parents, and taken up from Prepossession, the Company we converse with, or the Books we read on one side of the Question only, without thoroughly examining it, which surely we ought to do, very impartially, before we venture to act upon it, and change the happiest Country in the World from being the Assylum of the Gospel, a Refuge to persecuted Protestants, and the Seat of Liberty, into a Scene of Bloodshed, Persecution, and Idolatry. To argue upon any other Principles, than what are above laid down by our Saviour, like the Error of the *Manichees*, is to set up an evil and malignant Principle to rule Mankind to their Destruction, and to open a Passage, to a Train of superstitious, and enslaving Notions, as this of an indefeasible Right, which can belong to none, but God himself, instead of that benign, and

and beneficent Being, who could have no other motive to give being to us at first, or to concern himself about us at all, but only the great, Godlike, one of doing us good, and making us happy.

It was the Command of God to the *Israelites* to make no Covenant with the idolatrous *Canaanites*, and of St. *Paul* to Christians, not to be *unequally yoked together with unbelievers*, never in their Idolatries, nor in their civil Concerns, if they could avoid it, without a greater Inconvenience, which surely we may do now, that we have the Laws on our side, and Arms in our Hands, a brave and gallant Prince at our Head, and a Cause, the best in the World, the Defence of our Religion, and Liberties against those who are taught, that *whosoever killeth us doth God Service*. I wish I could with the same Confidence say, that we had God on our Side. But let us *humble ourselves under his mighty Hand, that he may exalt us in due time*. Let us reform ourselves, and add one to the Number of those few righteous, that may save the City. Let us *be strong and of good courage*, and contribute all we can to the common Safety, our Prayers, our Properties, and our personal Service, not despairing of his Protection to the Protestant Cause, though he may chastise us for a season to check the Growth of Faction, Vice and Impiety, which are risen to such a height amongst us.

But to slight such Blessings as we have enjoyed beyond all the Nations of the World, and to have so little concern for the free Enjoyment of the Gospel of Christ, the most valuable Treasure upon Earth, as not to afford a fair hearing to a Question of such Importance to it, but to give it up to Faction, to a Party prejudice, or a Reverence to Characters, would be making ourselves too like the *Jews, who had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge,*

knowledge, and rejected Christ out of zeal to the Law of Moses. God grant, the great Corruptions of the worst, the Coldness and Neglect of true Religion in the best, may never provoke him to remove our Candlestick, the Light of the Gospel, out of his place, and give it to a Nation, bringing forth the fruits thereof. Mat. 21. 43.

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